

A FRESH LOOK AT CAMP PERROT

After visiting the camp and finding it as beautiful as ever, I came home, sat down and asked myself questions:

Why should Camp Perrot be closed?

Some of the reasons discussed in past meetings of the Camp Committee were:

- "limited programme"
- "limited site"
- "closing in by homes"
- "counsellors too young"
- "poor swimming"
- "bank erosion"

1. PROGRAM:

Because of its limited area, it does not offer enough scope in programme.

For a two week camp, and we are not really concerned with those who stay longer, the programme has a great deal of scope. The main elements of camping are present e.g. outdoor living, tents, reasonably good swimming, fresh air, sun, regular meals and the opportunity to learn how to get along with others. Program items, such as woodwork, archery, clay modelling, leatherwork, carving, paddling woodsmanship (fair only), Nature study and hikes (fair only), council fires, Backwoodsman Day, the masquerade, Indian Day, The Olympics, Skit Nights, The Rodeo, The Indian Decathlon, The Penny Fair etc. are as good, and in many cases, better than those I have experienced at other camps.

Woods Area:

The Grove provides as beautiful a chapel site as any I have stood in, anywhere. It is also a favourite play area and can be increased in size by another Reforestration project.

Open Areas:

The open areas have a distinctive advantage over many camps in that the fields dry out very quickly after even a heavy storm. Last year we were rained in one morning which was not necessary because by 9:30 a.m. the camp was dry enough for an outdoor programme.

Hikes:

Hikes are really not necessary as they can be replaced by "cookouts" and "sleep outs". A boy at camp for two weeks would not miss a hike as there are many other things to do. However, half day visits are always possible and Windmill Point will be available for over night hikes for several years more.

Canoe Trips:

It will be many years before all possible camp sites are closed to us. At this point it would not be difficult to make arrangements with some of the farmers to set up a semi-permanent site for our canoe trips.

Swimming:

The swimming is safe, in fact, ideal as far as depth as a safety factor is concerned. It is easily supervised. The muddy water is not unclean - "clean dirt"!

Pollution:

The problem of pollution will be lessened a great deal as the seaway will keep the water 18" higher than the low level mark of the past. Considering that a river can purify 1/50 of its own volume in raw sewage, the 18" increase in the water level will help considerably. This increase will improve our swimming pool 100% as the depth of the inner pool (non-swimmers) was down to 18" by the end of the summer. Now that the ships turn in at Beauharnois instead of the Soulange there will be no more half oranges, cabbage leaves etc. washing in on our shores. Incidentally, there is some talk of making the Soulange Canal a fish breeding ground.

The solution to pollution as a problem of the future can be solved by building a swimming pool with plank siding similar to the one which was operated at Belmont Park for many years. This would have many advantages - clear water, better water, diving, better supervision, better swim meets, less wind etc. etc. bett Personally I prefer a pool and I am inclined to think that most campers do too.

2. THE CAMP SITE:

The "closing in" by housing developments will not "cramp our style" if we blot out the surroundings outside the camp area by trees. The cottages to the East of the camp are really no trouble because of the bank of trees on that side. This bank could be made deeper so that the cottages would not be seen from the camp. Similarly with the West side and the road.

Tamarock

About 1950 Mr. Ross Seaman and staff, planted ash, spruce, poplar and tamarock in the lower camp. The ash now stand about 6' high, the spruce about 6' the poplar about 10 - 12' and the tamarock about 15' and are 8' through the butt end.

Another reforestration project, with the areas ploughed and fertilized (Mr. Robillard has a mountain of manure), and the trees (poplar, tamarock and spruce) about three feet high would give us an enclosed camp in about five years. A bank of trees across the water front (top of bank) and protected by a snow fence would quickly cut down the strong winds which tear the tents.

The spruce planted at the back of the camp now stand 3 - 5' high and were put in at 6" about 5 years ago. Their success is due to better soil and no wind. The trees planted on the low side of the dinning hall are 10 times the size of those planted in the lower camp at the same time.

Erosion of the Bank:

This problem is two fold. First, there is the surface water in the spring from the melting snow. It has cut three gulleys in the bank. One which is exactly as it was before the bank was graded and sodded. This can only be prevented by rock and trees to hold the ground.

Secondly, there are the waves and high water in the spring, which splash against the bottom of the bank and wash the soil away. This problem can be solved by building a railway tie wall (we need a C.P.R. contact) similar to the present one at the bottom of the steps. We have lost very little of the bank here and would not have lost any if he had built the wall about two ties higher. This wall was built about six years ago and is still as solid as it was the day it was put in. We plan to experiment further this year if we can get some more ties.

Many poplar have come up on their own at the base of the bank to the west of the swimming area.

The area above the road:

This area could be developed into a Day Camp site by building a swimming pool. The cost of the pool could be paid for over 20 years by the branches that use it from the money saved by not having to travel so far.

Over night camp sites, ball diamonds, ring, soccer field, outdoor theatre, etc. etc. are all possible programme items which could be developed. Here again the area would have to be enclosed by trees.

Or the land could be sold as it is not used to any extent by the camp at present. Mr. Leduc and Mr. Lalonde to the East and Mr. Robillard to the West, have all sold or have given options on their properties to the rear of their homes. However, money is not everything, and the Day Camp idea is a great success and worth hundreds of thousands in terms of happy children.

The Day Camp Has Only One Problem:

Sites not too far away. Other branches deeper in the city would soon turn to Perrot as a site if it were developed.

It would be ideal if the triangular lot to the east of the lower camp could be acquired as no one could then build on this side because of the huge gulley bordering on the East.

Perrot has the tremendous advantage of being near the city - this was the original thinking and should never be overlooked - it keeps costs down, makes for easier directing and still provides a camping experience for hundreds of boys and girls.

So much for "Programme" and "Site" two factors supposedly against Perrot.

3. LEADERSHIP:

Adult leadership at Perrot has always been of the highest calibre, if I may say so! People like Bob Kneeland, Bill Osterman, Hugh Stratton, Ronnie Tyres, Bill McRae, Archie Church etc. are all professional people who have been associated with camping all their lives and still are in this field.

The only reason Perrot has not been able to hold these people is because of better offers from other camps. With a few improvements in living quarters and a little more money most could be obtained again.

Counsellors are a different story. It has only been during the last three years that I have been able to keep the average age of the Counsellors at 16. However, there has been steady improvement over the years in this area. Last year we had only one Counsellor that smoked!

This year is the first time that I have had so many applications that I am going to have to turn five of them down and they all look good. This is due to the new policy at Kanawana which raises the Counsellor minimum age to 17. This leaves all the 16 year old Rangers available for Perrot. Perrot will provide a good experience for them ("training ground" if you like) before they go to Kanawana as many of them will but only because of better honorariums!!!

4. Campers - Parents - Fees:

Every year the most common remark made by parents is "what a beautiful spot this is". They appreciate the nearness of the camp to the city. Our feelings are not in sympathy with their's in this respect. However, very few broke the "Visiting Days Only" rules and most of these people had reasonable excuses.

The campers enjoy their stay at Perrot. I have had many letters from both campers and parents over the last eight years. We were troubled at one time with "run aways" but have had none in the past two or three years. Many campers have been to both camps and prefer Perrot — possibly due to the fact that we are more of a family than is Kanawana with its four sections and individual tent sites. Young campers prefer to be near the other tents especially when their counsellors are away for a few hours in the evenings— hence I am not completely sold on the idea that the "tent circle" is not as good an arrangement as the individual tent sites. Many of the old ideas, even though old, are still the best. The tent circle and an open camp is much easier to supervise, and to keep clean, and for the younger campers it is ideal.

Perhaps we should consider increasing the age of the Bantam Camper at Kanawana and lowering the age of the Perrot camper although I would not want to go lower than 8 years — even this age group is not what I would call "of camp age". The age range is now 9 - 14 and perhaps should be 8 - 13. This would mean a loss of 15, 14 year olds and 1 fifteen year old last year, and could readily be replaced by 8 year olds.

Ages of Boy Campers:	Age	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
(average over the past 3 years)		37.3	40.	37.3	32.	27.	11.6	.66

Average age of Campers over 3 years: Boys 10.73
Girls 10.10

This would increase the gap between the oldest campers (13) and the youngest counsellors (16). Or should we think in terms of school grade levels (mental and friend ages) rather than chronological age.

Say grade 3 to grade 7. This kind of thinking is more meaningful to me than chronological age. It would tie in easier with the idea of neighbourhood groups coming to camp and with promotions in the elementary schools.

Camper fees at Perrot have increased from about \$9.50 per week to \$17.00 per week over the past 10 years and should be increased \$1.00 per year over the next 6 years or until Perrot can pay its own way. The Foremen's Club pay the full cost of each sponsored camper week (22.50?) and about 90% of the others can afford to pay the full cost. This idea would have to be coupled with an extensive promotion programme to ensure a full camp.

The fact that 90% of our clientel are in the middle income bracket, speaks highly of Perrot both as a Camp and a camp site.

Perrot really does not and has not, for many years, served the group it was supposed to. Possibly the lower income group are being served by the Day Camps — or should be — or could be if the upper camps were developed.

The Absorption of Perrot Campers into Kanawana.

This is an impossible idea both financially and numbers-wise. There are 282 (average over past 4 years) different boys and girls served by Perrot each summer and Kanawana has always had a full camp. The new Senior Camp for the increased number of new campers that we are bound to get over the years.

Girls' Camp has always been full at Perrot. Perhaps we should take a look at the figures for the 5th and 6th weeks of Boys' Camp and decide whether or not we should have 4 weeks of boys and 4 weeks of girls — in order to maintain a full camp. I would prefer to see a heavier promotion programme for Boys' Camp. Branches should be required to provide a certain minimum number of Campers for both camps — it is not enough just to hand out folders. There should be letters to all Y members of camping age plus extra letters for their "pals". Perhaps this is already being done. I have no idea of how promotion are handled — should we be more aware of how it is handled? Children come to camp in neighbourhood groups — this is by far the best way because it helps ensure a happy camping experience. The Lake Shore area should not be overlooked just because it is a Kanawana constituency — particularly with regard to the younger campers. The idea of sending a young camper away up to Kanawana is not as readily acceptable to a parent as is sending him out to Perrot where he can easily be visited.

ATTITUDE:

Regardless of what is thought of the above, the idea that Perrot may close any year in the near future has proved most detrimental to the attitude of the staff toward their work at camp. This rumour, and it is more than a rumour, for at the July meeting held at Perrot last summer (see Minutes, July 15th, 1958) "It was stated that the policy regarding continuing operation of Perrot would be as follows:

1. Close Perrot as soon as a new camp site is obtained.

We are also told by every branch visitor (and also by members of the Camp Office Staff) that Perrot was to be closed next year. This rumour spread very quickly right down to the campers and out to the surrounding neighbours. We were also told by the neighbours that the camp property had been sold! All these rumours took the wind out of the staff's sail including my own. There is not one person associated with the camp, present or past, who wants to see it close and there is no reason why it should.

1. The Resident and Day Camps both be developed.
2. If the Y.M.C.A. must have the money, that only the area back of the barn be sold (no Day Camp) and that the lower half be continued as a Resident Camp.
3. One definite number of years be stipulated for the operation of Perrot so that major repairs, such as, tent platforms may be planned for and so that the staff will have some faith in the future and plan for the future of Perrot.

Respectfully submitted

Don Cochrane

P.S. See "Statement and Recommendations Regarding Resident Camping in the Toronto Y.M.C.A. in response to the President's call".

According to this - we will not only need Perrot, Kanawana, and the Senior Boys' Camp but more - within the next 10 years and all self-supporting. Where subsidy is required "lay groups and service clubs find resident camps a most attractive service project". Can we get more service clubs interested in Perrot?